

STORY BEHIND SILENT NO LONGER TENNESSEE

It was Oct. 17, 2017 when God, fate, or some other power answered my prayer in the most unexpected and unbelievable way anyone could imagine.

I was desperately struggling to finish an important letter, and the more I searched for the perfect words, the more stubborn the words became; refusing to come no matter how long I stared at the paper. I was on a tight deadline and knew I couldn't wait for my writer's block to end. But, staring at the paper wasn't accomplishing anything. I sat the paper and pen aside and picked up my phone. To this day I don't know why I did that; it wasn't a conscious decision. In fact, it was as if someone or something guided my hand, and once the phone was in my hand, I didn't know what to do with it. After staring at it for what seemed like an eternity, I found myself logging onto Facebook. I don't remember that being a conscious decision either, but it was clearly the right decision.

I scanned my news feed, halfheartedly skimming over friends' posts, my mind still focused on the letter. But something caught my eye and my focus quickly turned to, of all things, a hashtag. I hadn't seen social media or television in a couple of days and had no idea what this hashtag meant. Under normal circumstances, I would have saved a post and gone back later; but this was far from normal circumstances.

For months, I prayed every night I wouldn't wake up the next morning. When sunlight came, I cried and begged God to end my suffering. After being raped in a parking lot in June 2017, I found myself sinking deeper and deeper into a hole of depression; with no idea how to climb out. Despite being a former police officer, I became one of the sixty-four percent of sexual assault victims who don't report their assault. Intellectually I knew the perpetrator was the only one to blame, but like many victims, I blamed myself. I was a former cop. I had the training and skills to defend myself, and I'd successfully used that training to defend myself on the streets of Nashville many times. This time was different; this time I couldn't defend myself, and this predator stole every ounce of confidence, self-worth and will I possessed.

Convinced God would never answer my prayer, and unable to live with the emotional pain that was suffocating me, I developed a plan and started writing goodbye letters. It was that last goodbye letter, the letter with the tight deadline that forced me to pause. It was the stubbornness of words that delayed what I thought was inevitable. And it was the #metoo hashtag that served as my ladder out of that dark hole of depression.

Seeing that hashtag time and time again brought light into what had seemed to be impenetrable darkness. It was realizing how many people had gone through what I had that made me realize I wasn't alone. It was knowing they found a way to keep putting one foot in front of the other that gave me hope I could do the same. It was a social media hashtag that saved my life.

God answered my prayer, just not in the way I had thought. While I was praying I would never see light again, He was planning on bringing me a new kind of light; the light of hope and healing.

I am here today because someone had the courage to share their story. Since then, I have chosen to turn the pain I felt into a purpose, a mission and a catalyst for good. If my story can help just one person hang on for one more day, it was all worth it. If advocating for others keeps one person from experiencing the pain of sexual assault, it is worth it.

There will be people who are skeptical, who make excuses and who are too self-absorbed in their own aspirations to speak out. There will be people who choose to look the other way and choose to remain silent because they don't have the courage or morality to demand change. There's little I can do about that, other than continuing to share my story in hopes of convincing one person to do what is right. If that person convinces another person, and that person another, together we can begin to make a difference.